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# Indicator Standards: Operational Guidelines for Selecting Indicators for the HIV Response



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JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS

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## Indicator Standards: Operational Guidelines for Selecting Indicators for the HIV Response

These operational guidelines provide detailed information on **how to use a tool to assess the extent to which indicators intended for use in responses to HIV<sup>1</sup> and AIDS meet a set of internationally-agreed standards**. These operational guidelines, the indicator assessment tool and the standards have all been produced by the Indicators Technical Working Group [TWG] of the UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group [MERG].

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IMPORTANT NOTE: A PDF version of the Operational Guidelines and the accompanying Excel template for scoring indicators (see page 10 for a reference to the this template) can be downloaded from the MERG section of the Global HIV M&E Information web portal. The direct link to this section of the web portal is:  
<http://www.globalhivmeinfo.org/AgencySites/Pages/MERG%20UNAIDS%20ME%20Reference%20Group.aspx>

## Brief background

In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluating HIV epidemics and responses to them. This has contributed to a proliferation of indicators, which are not harmonized with each other. This can make it difficult to accurately track the epidemic and the response at both the global and national level. This proliferation has also resulted in an increased reporting burden at the national level. Consequently, the UNAIDS MERG launched an initiative to harmonise, improve the quality and reduce the quantity of indicators recommended for assessing responses to HIV and AIDS. The main aim of this initiative is to ensure that indicators provide decision-makers and key stakeholders at national and sub-national levels with useful, feasible and relevant information to help them manage and implement their country's response to the epidemic effectively. Indicator selection is not an end in itself. Rather, indicators need to be selected which will clearly demonstrate if desired results have been achieved.

An additional aim is to reduce the burden of global reporting on countries by harmonising global level indicators across multilateral and bilateral organisations.

To achieve its objectives, the MERG has agreed to a set of indicator standards and has developed a tool to assess the extent to which these standards are applied to different indicators in various settings. By having these explicit standards and a tool to assess the extent to which indicators meet them, it will be easier to develop and revise indicators that are relevant, useful and feasible.

## The standards

An individual indicator<sup>2</sup> should meet the following five standards.

1. The indicator is **needed and useful** (see p11)
2. The indicator **has technical merit** (see p12)
3. The indicator **is fully-defined** (see p13)
4. It is **feasible to collect and analyse data** for this indicator (see p14)
5. The indicator has been **field-tested or used in practice** (see p15)

In addition, where indicators are presented as part of a set, this set should meet a sixth standard, namely that the overall set is coherent and balanced (see p15).

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<sup>2</sup> It is intended that these standards should be relevant to all indicators, including those which seek to measure policy as well as those which measure practice.

## Where are these standards applicable?

The MERG recognises that these standards could be applied in a variety of different settings. These include:

1. *Global* – The standards are relevant for indicators which are included/being considered for inclusion in internationally-agreed indicator sets for tracking progress of national responses to HIV and AIDS, such as those recommended by UNAIDS for monitoring progress in implementing the Declaration of Commitment agreed by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session [UNGASS] on HIV and AIDS in 2001 and those recently proposed as additional recommended indicators.
2. *National* – The standards are relevant at the national level for people, who need to select, revise and use indicators to monitor and manage their own response to HIV and AIDS. For the purpose of this document, the national setting includes sub-national and local settings.
3. *Thematic* – Technical experts, who are developing indicators for use in monitoring activities conducted in general and specific focus areas, should use the standards during the indicator development process. Examples of thematic areas include counseling and testing, prevention of mother to child transmission and male circumcision.
4. *Large-scale and/or donor-funded programmes*<sup>3</sup> – Managers and M&E specialists, who are developing or reviewing indicators to monitor large-scale and/or donor-funded programmes should also use the standards during these processes. Examples of these types of programmes or donor organisations include PEPFAR, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and the World Bank.

## Who should use these guidelines?

These guidelines are focused at the national level and are meant for anyone who needs to develop new indicators, or select or review existing indicators for assessing responses to HIV and AIDS.

In addition, the guidelines may be useful for other people involved in the settings outlined above, including multilateral and bilateral agencies, national M&E specialists and programme/project managers. In particular, work conducted by Indicator Review Panels<sup>4</sup> at the global level, which will be part of the MERG's Indicators Technical Working Group, will be a resource for such people, allowing them to select or prioritise indicators based on an assessment process that has already been done. Using pre-assessed indicators could contribute considerably to reducing reporting burden and promoting harmonisation.

Although this was not the intention, there has been interest in using the standards beyond HIV and AIDS. It is envisaged that this would be possible with minor adjustments.

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3 Many such 'programmes' describe themselves in different ways. For example, PEPFAR describes itself as an initiative. The Global Fund does not see itself as having its own programmes. Rather, it supports national programmes. Whilst recognising these issues, this document uses the term 'programmes' to describe these and other large-scale donor-funded activities.

4 It is also envisaged that countries may have similar indicator review panels (see p06).

## When can the indicator standards and indicator assessment tool be used?

It is envisaged that these standards and the associated indicator assessment tool will be useful at different stages in the settings described above, for example, when developing new indicators, when selecting from existing indicators, when seeking to revise and improve indicators, and when reviewing indicators.

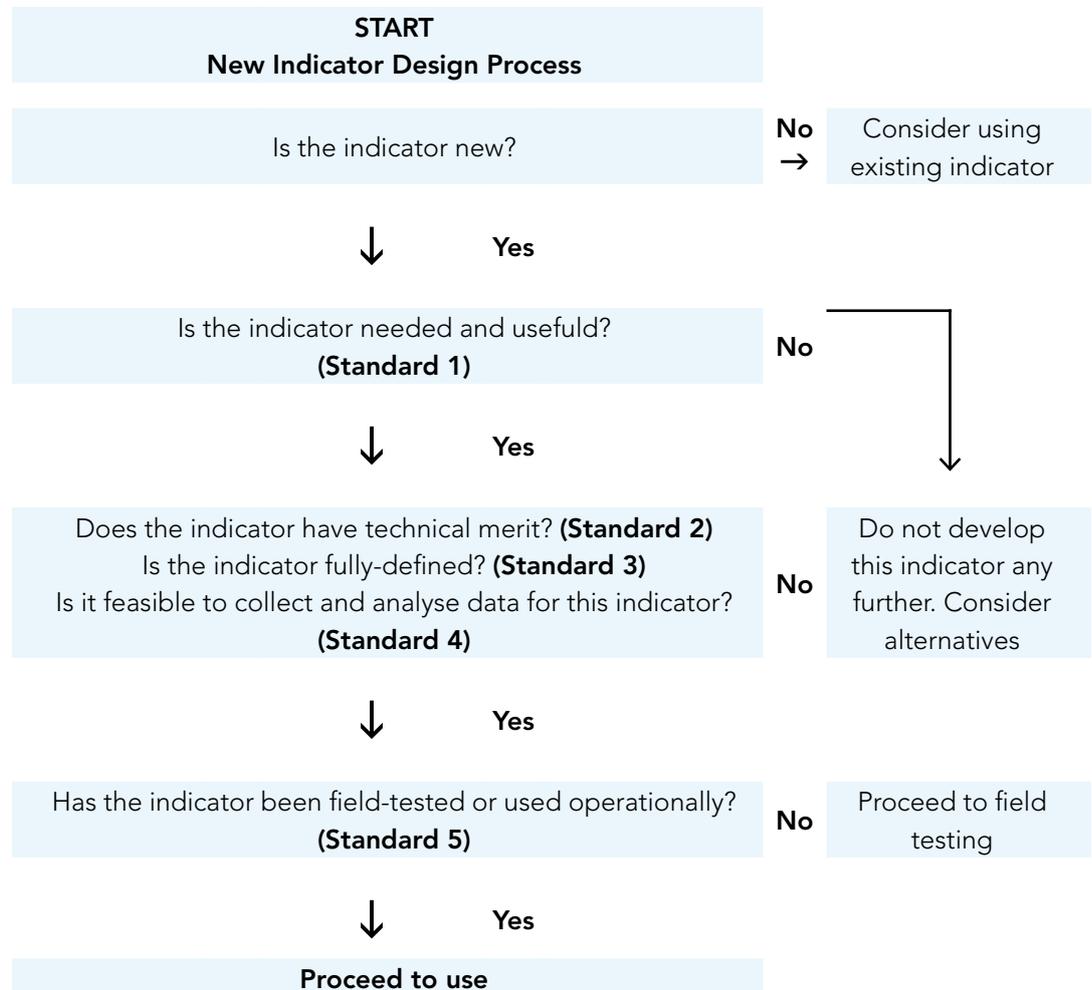
- **Developing new indicators:** Referring to the standards at this stage makes it more likely that good indicators will be developed, namely those that are feasible and practical to measure at reasonable<sup>5</sup> cost. It also makes it less likely that new indicators could be introduced that may duplicate or contradict existing indicators. It is recommended that development of new indicators follows a four-step, decision-making process (see Figure 1):

1. Is the indicator really new? Has it or something similar been defined and used previously?
2. Does the proposed new indicator meet standard 1, that is, is it needed and useful? If it does not meet this standard, it should **NOT** be developed further.
3. Does the proposed new indicator meet standards 2-4, that is, does it have technical merit, is it fully-defined and is it feasible to measure it? If it does not meet these standards, it should not be developed further. But, if it does, it should then be field-tested.
4. Does the proposed new indicator meet standard 5, that is, has the indicator been field-tested or used operationally. If the indicator is new, it will not have been used operationally. If a new indicator has not been field-tested, this needs to be conducted. Indicator descriptions need to summarise information on the extent to which the indicator has been used or field-tested.

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<sup>5</sup> It has not yet been possible to clearly define 'reasonable' in this context. A working definition for these guidelines is that someone considers the indicator sufficiently worth measuring that they are willing to fund the costs of doing this.

Figure 1: Flow chart for designing new indicators



- **Selecting indicators:** The standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful when selecting indicators to include within indicator sets so that each set has a small number of high quality indicators. An important resource for locating existing indicators is the UNAIDS' Indicator Registry<sup>6</sup>. If similar indicators exist, it is important to harmonise with other agencies, so that everyone can measure the same indicator using the same systems and time frames.
- **Revising and improving indicators:** The standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful for those creating or modifying indicators from existing ones. For example, at national level, the standards may be useful in improving indicators used within the national response, bringing them more in line with international standards.
- **Reviewing indicators:** Finally, the standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful when reviewing indicators. In particular, the standards and tool may be useful for those who wish to revise and strengthen existing indicators, for example, in national M&E plans. In many settings, there are existing sets of indicators. These need to be the starting point for the development of a new indicator set. Given that indicators measure the achievement of programme results, indicators should be reviewed and revised when programmes are reviewed, for example, when a new national HIV strategic plan is being developed.

A number of examples of use of the indicator standards and indicator assessment tool are presented in Box 1.

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<sup>6</sup> The Indicator Registry <http://indicatorregistry.org/> is an online database of indicators used to track the HIV and AIDS epidemic and response. It was developed to improve: 1) access to information on indicators; 2) the management of indicators, including the development of new indicators, the revision of existing indicators and the retirement of out-of-date indicators; 3) the harmonisation of indicators; and 4) the selection of appropriate indicators to monitor a country's epidemic and response.

### Box 1: Using the tool to select and review indicators: Practical experience

One of the first experiences of using the tool and standards was in the development of a new generation of **PEPFAR** indicators. This process involved a wide range of technical and M&E experts. One of the lessons learned was the value of having the process led and managed by M&E specialists with access to technical specialists in relevant fields. The process provided early experience of scoring indicators, including the development of the current scoring system which awards an indicator an overall percentage score based on an aggregation of scores against individual standards.

Throughout 2009, the Indicators Technical Working Group (TWG) of the MERG has operated five **Indicator Review Panels** (IRPs) which have reviewed forty UNGASS and Additional Recommended indicators. Based on their experience, it is proposed that members of such panels review indicators independently and then meet together to discuss significant comments and areas of divergent scores. The biggest challenge faced by IRPs was lack of required information. As a result, it is proposed that information packs related to indicators should be expanded beyond the current detailed descriptions (see Annex 4, p17).

**ECDC** (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) has used the indicator standards in seeking to develop a number of indicators for monitoring progress in implementation of the Dublin Declaration. As a result, the proposed indicator set is based on existing international indicators, particularly UNGASS. However, there is a need for such international indicator sets to be flexible enough to reflect significant variations between regions.

Several groups have used the standards and tool for the development of indicators in particular thematic areas. For example, **DFID** and the **UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development** collaborated to review available care and support indicators. This experience demonstrated the importance of consulting broadly with stakeholders to identify existing indicators and the value of the standards and tool in identifying the strongest available indicators in a particular field. **PEPFAR**, **WHO** and others collaborated to use the standards to propose international indicators in the field of nutrition. In particular, this group was the first to document a review of their proposed indicators against the indicator standards.

### Box 1: Using the tool to select and review indicators: Practical experience

Some countries have begun to use the standards and tool in developing indicators for their national response. For example, **Senegal** used the standards in August/September 2009 to review some of the indicators being used in the National AIDS Programme. This involved translating the standards and tool into French. The tool was very well-accepted and found to be useful for selecting new indicators and for identifying problems with indicators. There were challenges in applying the tool to indices. The standards and tool are likely to be particularly useful to countries during reviews of their national strategies and M&E plans. There is a need for agencies to communicate clearly the availability of these standards and tool, and to support countries with financial and human resources to use them in their strategic planning processes.

There has been some experience of using the standards and tool beyond HIV. For example, in July 2009, a number of agencies used the standards as part of a workshop on the Regional Action Plan for the **Malaria** Control and Elimination in the Western Pacific in July 2009. The standards were used as a basis for group discussion of particular indicators. However, the process was dominated by people who had interests in seeing particular indicators included. As a result, the process was extremely long and resulted in very few indicators being eliminated. This experience shows the importance of independent review and scoring.

The **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria** are planning to use the tool to assess indicators related to community systems strengthening and quality of services in 2010.

# The Indicator Assessment Tool

This tool has been developed for assessing indicators against the standards<sup>7</sup>. It consists of a first part which focuses on the five standards for individual indicators. The second part focuses on assessing a complete set of indicators. (see Annex 1, p17.)

It is acknowledged that using the indicator assessment tool is a rigorous and time-consuming process. While this may be useful for groups, such as national indicator review panels, it is recognized that there may be value in having a simplified checklist for use by a wider group, e.g. stakeholder workshop to review indicators within a national M&E plan. Such a checklist is presented as Annex 2 of these guidelines (p20). It is suggested that this checklist be used as a basis for discussion among stakeholders. A quality indicator would expect to score 'yes' against each of these nine questions.

One of the biggest challenges faced by panels<sup>8</sup> reviewing indicators is access to needed information about the indicator. There has been a great deal of improvement in recent years in terms of more detailed description of indicators, however, information related to other standards is usually not provided in such descriptions. Annex 3 (p21) provides a format for panels to request additional information from indicator developers.

A number of systems for scoring indicators against the standards were reviewed during 2009. These included star-based and numerical systems. Overall, a scoring system which assigned an indicator an overall percentage score was considered most useful. An Excel template for review panels to score indicators has been developed. The process of scoring is considered important for indicator review panels because:

- It ensures a degree of rigour which would not be provided by comments alone
- It allows rapid differentiation between good and poor indicators. This is particularly useful when reviewing large numbers of available indicators
- It identifies weak areas of particular indicators. For example, an indicator may score poorly against one particular standard
- Divergent scores between different panel members provide a good basis for discussion

However, there are a number of concerns about formally publishing indicator scores. These include:

- Concerns that a single, aggregate score is too simplistic for grading complex indicators
- Concerns that the allocation of a score is relatively subjective and may vary between observers
- Concerns that an indicator's score could vary markedly depending on context. For example, an indicator could be highly appropriate for one country context while being inappropriate in another

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<sup>7</sup> A number of versions of the tool were developed for use in different contexts. The version presented here is for use by countries at national level. Additional versions include those for use at global level, for assessment of themes and for use by large multi-country programmes (see p03).

<sup>8</sup> Although these comments apply to all indicator review panels, including those that operate at a global level, in this context they primarily refer to national panels

One of the most important lessons learned to date from the experience of panels assessing and reviewing indicators against the standards was the importance of qualitative comments made by individual reviewers. These comments have proved particularly useful in identifying areas of weakness in particular indicators and suggesting ways in which they might be improved.

For this reason, it is **not** proposed to formally publish indicator scores, e.g. in the Indicator Registry<sup>6</sup>. However, scores are still considered useful for Indicator Review Panels and for developers of indicators during the development process. It is proposed that new indicators would only be added to the Indicator Registry if they are considered to meet the indicator standards.

## Assessing the standards

Each standard is assessed according to a number of criteria by asking a series of questions. The extent to which an indicator meets each criterion produces a score, as specified in the indicator assessment tool (see Annexes 1, p11). If information is absent or inadequate to answer a particular question, a score of zero should be recorded<sup>9</sup>. Scores are aggregated across the different criteria within each standard producing a score for each standard. Questions and scores vary slightly for different settings, that is, whether the indicator is being assessed for use in a global, country, thematic or programmatic setting. These guidelines focus on use of the indicator assessment tool at national level.

## Standard 1: The indicator is needed and useful

### Is there evidence that this indicator is needed at national level? [Q1.1-1.2<sup>10</sup>]

Primarily, a country needs indicators to measure the performance of its national response to HIV. National-level indicators need to specifically measure performance in those areas essential to an effective national response to HIV and AIDS. To achieve this, indicators need to be relevant to the country context. In addition, a country needs indicators to measure its performance in implementing international commitments that it has made.

### Which stakeholders need and would use the information collected by this indicator? [Q1.3-1.4]

If an indicator is to be of value, it is important that the information it generates is needed by and is useful to someone. Good indicators will produce information of value to a range of people including, particularly, stakeholders involved in managing the national response to HIV and AIDS<sup>11</sup>. Other stakeholders that might use information from an indicator will vary according to context but might include development partners, technical experts and programme managers.

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<sup>9</sup> However, it is hoped that this situation can be avoided by providing the information outlined in Annex 3 (p16).

<sup>10</sup> These notations refer to question numbers within the tool (see Annex 1, p11).

<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this document, in-country stakeholders are considered to be a broad group which includes, but is not limited to, those who are directly managing the overall national response to HIV and AIDS. For more information, see work conducted by Measure Evaluation on stakeholder engagement on [www.cpc.unc.edu/measure](http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure)

### **How would information from this indicator be used? [Q1.5]**

### **What effect would this information have on planning and decision-making? [Q1.6]**

Measuring an indicator can involve considerable time, effort and cost. For such a process to be worthwhile, the information generated needs to be used in some way. This use may involve plans for development of programmes and responses. It may involve making certain decisions, for example, allocation of resources. Some indicators provide information that is essential for a particular context, that is, it would be impossible to implement a particular element of the response effectively without that information. However, some indicators provide information that is helpful, that is, the response can be implemented without the information from that indicator but it is helpful to have it.

### **Is this information available from other indicators? [Q1.7]**

### **Is this indicator harmonised with other indicators? [Q1.8-1.10]**

If we are contemplating measuring a particular indicator, it is essential to be sure that the information we are seeking is not already available from another indicator. A key resource for determining this is the UNAIDS' Indicator Registry. If similar indicators exist, it is important to harmonise with other agencies, so that everyone can measure the same indicator using the same systems and time frames.

## **Standard 2: The indicator has technical merit**

A good indicator needs to have technical merit. This can be considered in two areas – substantive and monitoring merit. Both of these areas can be assessed by appropriate peer review

### **Substantive merit [Q2.1-2.4]**

Substantive merit can be assessed by asking what evidence there is that experts working in the specific technical area consider this indicator to be technically sound and significant. It is important that the indicator measures something of significance and importance within a particular field, and that the indicator is a clear and focused measure. It should be clear how to interpret changes in the level of the indicator and the indicator should be sufficiently sensitive to detect changes in performance.

It is possible to consider question 2.1 to be a pivotal question, i.e. if the answer to this question is 'no', the indicator should not be assessed further.

### **Monitoring merit [Q2.5-2.6]**

Any indicator also needs to make sense from a monitoring perspective. Many of the issues relevant to this are covered under standard 3 – the indicator is fully-defined (see p13). In addition, it is important that:

- The indicator is reliable and sensitive. In other words, it produces the same or very similar results, even if measured by different instruments, procedures and/or observers. The indicator has a limited margin of error.

- The indicator is valid and specific. In other words, it accurately measures what it intends to be measured. The indicator is unambiguous; it is not open to more than one interpretation.

### Peer review [Q2.7-2.9]

A key process in assessing substantive and monitoring merit is rigorous and exhaustive peer review. It is envisaged that indicator review panels (p04) of the UNAIDS MERG, could be a key resource for peer review processes. Countries may also consider it useful to establish their own indicator review panels. It is essential that one or more people with the following experience review all proposed indicators:

- M&E expertise to ensure they meet required standards of monitoring merit
- Technical expertise in the thematic area of relevance to a particular indicator
- Programme experience/expertise

In particular, national indicators should be reviewed by key national programme managers. The modality and composition of peer review at national level needs to be clearly defined in each country.

For the purpose of this document, it is assumed that the peer reviews referred to were positive, i.e. they recommended use of a particular indicator.

## Standard 3: The indicator is fully-defined

For any indicator to be considered fully-defined, it should specify the following items. Given that precise terminology varies in different descriptions of indicators, it is not necessary for the description to include specific terms as long as the information specified is available:

- **Title and definition [Q3.1]** – for the purpose of this guide, the title is a short summary of the indicator that could be easily used on a day-to-day basis, for example ‘Young People: Knowledge about HIV Prevention’. This is also sometimes called a ‘summary title’.

For the purpose of this guide, the definition is a clear and brief description of the indicator, for example ‘Percentage of young people aged 15-24 who both correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission’. This is also sometimes called the ‘full title’.

Where an indicator is part of an international / global indicator set, this should be stated<sup>12</sup>.

- **Purpose and rationale [Q3.2]** – there needs to be a statement of what the indicator is for and why it is needed.

12 In some cases, this fit to international/global indicator sets is stated in an indicator’s purpose and rationale.

- There should be a detailed description of the **method of measurement [Q3.3]**. Where applicable, this should explain any calculations needed and what the numerators and denominators for these are.
- The **collection method [Q3.4]** – that is, how data will be collected for this indicator, including the data source.
- The **measurement frequency [Q3.5]** – that is, how often this indicator will be measured. This should be consistent with the collection method specified. For example, if information is to come from a survey conducted every two years, the measurement frequency should be every two years and not, for example, monthly or quarterly. If the measurement and reporting frequency differ this should be stated.
- If the indicator’s data is to be **disaggregated [Q3.6]**, for example, by age or sex, details of how this will be done should be provided.
- Guidelines should be provided as to how to **interpret [Q3.7]** changes in the indicator. For example, what does it mean if the indicator shows an increasing level? If there are different possible interpretations, how can these be distinguished?
- The **strengths and weaknesses [Q3.8]** of the indicator are stated. In particular, common challenges in measuring the indicator need to be stated, and practical suggestions given on how to overcome these.
- **Additional sources of information [Q3.9]** – including original descriptions of the indicator, examples of its use in practice and links to any international commitment to which the indicator is attached. This would also include links and/or references to technical background documents, as appropriate.

## Standard 4: It is feasible to collect and analyse data for this indicator

There is little point in selecting a technically strong indicator for a national response if it is simply not feasible to measure it because of lack of capacity or resources. This standard has to date largely been overlooked by those designing indicators. But, this needs to change. A good indicator needs to be one that is feasible to measure with reasonable levels<sup>13</sup> of resources and capacity.

First, **systems and mechanisms [Q4.1-4.2]** are needed to collect, interpret and use data for the indicator. Clearly, it should be possible to assess how well these are functioning for existing indicators. Where new indicators are being considered, it may be that the systems and mechanisms needed are already in place for other similar indicators, for example, adding a question to an existing household survey. For national contexts, consideration needs to be given to systems and mechanisms in that country.

Second, one of the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness<sup>14</sup> is that development partners will align their support to countries’ national development strategies, institutions and procedures. In this context, this refers to the one **national HIV monitoring and evaluation system [Q4.3]**, as envisaged by the ‘Three Ones’ principles. Therefore, good indicators are those that are included in national M&E systems.

<sup>13</sup> A working definition of ‘reasonable capacity’ could be that which already exists or that which can be developed within the time frame and resources of the proposed program/initiative.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_3236398\\_35401554\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html)

Finally, evidence is required that **financial and human resources [Q4.4]** are available to allow an indicator to be measured and that the benefits of measuring the indicator are worth the costs [Q4.5]. While it is recognised that assessments of cost effectiveness can be difficult and subjective, this element has been included because of the tendency to recommend the tracking of multiple indicators with little attention to the cost of measuring them relative to the benefits gained.

## Standard 5: The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice

Indicators which appear sound on paper may turn out to have significant problems when they are used in practice. For this reason, it is important that new indicators are **field-tested [Q5.1]**. For existing indicators, extensive use in practice will provide the same information as field-testing, based on experience of use. For national contexts, the ideal situation is that the indicator will have been used in the country itself. In some cases, this will not be so and reliance may need to be placed on experience from other countries.

Finally, it is important that indicators are subject to **periodic review [Q5.2]**. This will detect problems with indicators, such as non-availability of data or lack of ability to discriminate between different standards of performance. In addition, situations may change meaning that an indicator needs to be changed, discarded or added. For example, development of new treatments or changes in programmatic practices might require such changes.

## Standard 6: The indicator set is coherent and balanced overall

Indicators rarely function independently. They are often incorporated into sets. In a country, such a set is likely to be the basis of the national monitoring system for HIV and AIDS. Different sets may have some of the same indicators. For example, many countries have incorporated UNGASS indicators into their national M&E systems.

Although a good indicator set requires good individual indicators, it does not necessarily follow that a set made up of good indicators is necessarily a good set. There could be too many indicators or too many of a particular type. A key indicator could be missing. It is important, therefore, to have a standard for assessing sets of indicators.

A good set of indicators should give an **overall picture of the adequacy or otherwise of the response being measured [Q6.1-6.3]**. At the national level, the indicator set should allow the country to assess the adequacy of its national response to HIV and AIDS, should allow it to report on its HIV-related international commitments and should allow it to compare its performance with other similar countries.

Sets should **cover all key elements of the response being assessed [Q6.4-6.6]**. Appropriate weight should be given to the different elements of a national response or programme. For example, an indicator set might be considered unbalanced if it had six

indicators for one element yet no indicator for an equally important element. A national indicator set needs primarily to be relevant to its own country context. For example, if the epidemic is spreading particularly among particular populations, indicators need to be selected that reflect this.

An indicator set should have an **appropriate mix of indicators [Q6.7-6.8]** at different monitoring levels. For example, there should be indicators to assess inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. There should be a mix of indicators which measure both the quantity of the services provided and their quality. The demand to measure everything needs to be balanced against what is feasible and desirable with available resources. There needs to be a **reasonable number of indicators [Q6.9]** for each context.

It is important to understand that an individual indicator may be part of more than one indicator set. Indeed, with increasing harmonisation, it would be hoped that this increasingly is the case. In particular, principles of alignment mean that global, thematic and programmatic sets of indicators should be based on indicators included in national HIV M&E systems.

# Annex 1: The Indicator Assessment Tool

<b>INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL: NATIONAL SETTINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARD 1: THE INDICATOR IS NEEDED AND USEFUL</b>	
Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)	
1.1-1.2	<p>Is there evidence that this indicator is needed at national level?</p> <p>1.1 This indicator measures performance against the goals/objectives/results of the national AIDS strategy or a key international commitment, for example, MDGs, UNGASS (1 point)</p> <p>1.2 This indicator is relevant to the country context (1 point)</p>
1.3-1.4	<p>Which stakeholders need and would use the information collected by this indicator?</p> <p>1.3 This indicator is accepted and used by all major international partners supporting work in this technical area in the country (1 point)</p> <p>1.4 This indicator produces information which is needed by and useful to national stakeholders (1 point)</p>
15	<p>How would information from this indicator be used?</p> <p>1.5 Information from this indicator would be helpful/essential for those managing the national response to HIV and AIDS (Helpful – 1 point; Essential – 2 points)</p>
1.6	<p>What effect would this information have on planning and decision-making?</p> <p>1.6 Information from this indicator is helpful/essential at national level to allow decisions to be made in terms of programme development and resource allocation (Helpful – 1 point; Essential – 2 points)</p>
1.7	<p>Is this information available from other indicators?</p> <p>1.7 This information is not available from other indicators (1 point)</p>
1.8-1.10	<p>Is this indicator harmonised with other indicators, for example, those being used by others in the country?</p> <p>1.8-1.10 This indicator is fully harmonised with other similar indicators in use in the country in the same technical field regarding:</p> <p>1.8 Detailed description (1 point)</p> <p>1.9 Systems for data collection (1 point)</p> <p>1.10 Time frames for data collection (1 point)</p>
<b>STANDARD 2: THE INDICATOR HAS TECHNICAL MERIT</b>	
Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)	
2.1-2.4	<p>Does the indicator have substantive merit?</p> <p>2.1 The indicator is significant and important within a particular technical field (1 point)</p> <p>2.2 The indicator provides a clear and focused measure of progress in a particular technical area (1 point)</p> <p>2.3 There is a clear understanding of what changes in the value of the indicator mean, how they should be interpreted and what kind of action to take as a result (1 point)</p> <p>2.4 The indicator is sensitive to pick up changes in performance (1 point)</p>
2.5-2.6	<p>Does the indicator have monitoring merit?</p> <p>2.5 The indicator is reliable and sensitive (1 point)</p> <p>2.6 The indicator is valid and specific (1 point)</p>

**INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL: NATIONAL SETTINGS**

2.7-2.9	Has the indicator been peer reviewed?	<p>2.7-2.9 The indicator has previously been reviewed by:</p> <p>2.7 People with expertise in the relevant technical area (1 point)</p> <p>2.8 People with monitoring and evaluation expertise, including particularly indicator design (1 point)</p> <p>2.9 Key national programme managers (1 point)</p>
<b>STANDARD 3: THE INDICATOR IS FULLY-DEFINED</b>		
<i>Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)</i>		
3.1-3.9	Is the indicator fully-defined?	<p>3.1 The indicator has a clearly stated title and definition (2 points)</p> <p>3.2 The indicator has a clearly stated purpose and rationale (2 points)</p> <p>3.3 The method of measurement for the indicator is clearly defined, including the description of the numerator, denominator and calculation, where applicable (4 points)</p> <p>3.4 The data collection method for the indicator is clearly stated (1 point)</p> <p>3.5 The measurement frequency for the indicator is clearly defined (1 point)</p> <p>3.6 Any relevant data disaggregation is clearly defined (1 point)</p> <p>3.7 There are clear guidelines to interpret and use data from this indicator (1 point)</p> <p>3.8 Strengths, weaknesses and challenges in using the indicator are clearly stated (1 point)</p> <p>3.9 Relevant sources of additional information on the indicator are cited (1 point)</p>
<b>STANDARD 4: IT IS FEASIBLE TO COLLECT AND ANALYSE DATA FOR THIS INDICATOR</b>		
<i>Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)</i>		
4.1-4.2	How well are the systems, tools and mechanisms, which are required to collect, interpret and use data for this indicator, functioning?	<p>4.1 Systems and mechanisms needed to collect data for this indicator are functioning in the country (3 points)</p> <p>4.2 Systems and mechanisms needed to interpret and use data for this indicator are functioning in the country (3 points)</p>
4.3	How would this indicator be integrated into a national M&E framework and system?	<p>4.3 This indicator is already included in the national AIDS M&amp;E system (3 points)</p>
4.4	To what extent are the financial and human resources available to measure this indicator?	<p>4.4 Financial (1 point) and human (1 point) resources are available to measure this indicator</p>

**INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL: NATIONAL SETTINGS**

4.5	What evidence exists that measuring this indicator is worth the cost?	4.5 Measuring this indicator is worth the cost (1 point)
<b>STANDARD 5: THE INDICATOR HAS BEEN FIELD-TESTED OR USED IN PRACTICE</b>		
Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)		
5.1	To what extent has the indicator been field tested or used in practice?	5.1 The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The country's national programme (3 points)</li> <li>• Countries with similar epidemics, for example, in the region (2 points)</li> <li>• Other countries (1 point)</li> </ul>
5.2	Is this indicator part of a system to review its performance in ongoing use?	5.2 This indicator is/will be part of a system of periodic review, for example, review of national AIDS strategy (1 point)
<b>STANDARD 6: THE INDICATOR SET IS COHERENT AND BALANCED OVERALL</b>		
Score the stated number of points for each of the following: (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)		
6.1-6.3	Does the indicator set give an overall picture of the adequacy or otherwise of the response being measured?	6.1-6.3 Data from this set of indicators allows... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.1 ...assessment of the adequacy of the national response to HIV and AIDS (1 point)</li> <li>6.2 ...the country to compare its performance with that of other similar countries (1 point)</li> <li>6.3 ...the country to report on all its HIV-related international commitments (1 point)</li> </ul>
6.4-6.6	Does the indicator set have an appropriate balance of indicators across elements of the response?	6.4-6.6 The indicator set... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.4 ... covers all elements of the national response to HIV and AIDS with no gaps (1 point)</li> <li>6.5 ...gives appropriate weight to elements of the national response to HIV and AIDS (1 point)</li> <li>6.6 ... is relevant to the national context (1 point)</li> </ul>
6.7-6.8	Does the indicator set cover different M&E levels appropriately?	6.7-6.8 The indicator set contains an appropriate mix of indicators measuring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.7 ...inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact (1 point)</li> <li>6.8 ... quantitative and qualitative elements (1 point)</li> </ul>
6.9	Is the number of indicators reasonable? <sup>15</sup>	6.9 The number of indicators is reasonable (1 point)

<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to define what a 'reasonable' number of indicators is. It will depend on context and the amount of work needed to collect information. However, a figure of around 20 is likely to be reasonable in many contexts.

# Annex 2: Simplified National Checklist

It is suggested that this checklist be used as a basis for discussion among stakeholders. A quality indicator would expect to score 'yes' against each of these nine questions.

It is important to note, however, that this checklist is not intended to replace the fuller indicator assessment tool (see Annex 1, p11). The checklist is designed for rapid use by a broader group of stakeholders and as a precursor to the detailed and rigorous application of the assessment tool by a national indicator review panel.

1. Is this indicator needed to measure performance against the national AIDS strategy or a key international commitment?
2. Is it clear how data from this indicator will be used to manage the national response to HIV and AIDS?
3. Is this indicator harmonized with other similar indicators in use in the country?
4. Is there consensus among technical experts that this indicator should be monitored?
5. Does this indicator reliably measure what it is intended to measure?
6. Is the indicator fully-defined?\*
7. Are systems available to allow this indicator to be measured?
8. Are adequate human and financial resources available to allow this indicator to be measured?
9. Has this indicator been used in practice<sup>16</sup>?

\* To be fully defined, an indicator should have:

- Title and definition
- Purpose and rationale
- Method of measurement
- Data collection method
- Measurement frequency
- Data disaggregation
- Guidelines for interpretation and use
- Strengths, weaknesses and challenges
- Sources of further information

# Annex 3: Indicator Information Sheet

The MERG Technical Working Group on indicators has a number of Indicator Review Panels (IRPs) which can, on request, review individual indicators and sets of indicators to give an independent assessment of the extent to which the proposed indicator(s) complies/comply with a focused set of internationally-agreed standards.

To aid an IRP with their assessment, it would be helpful if the party requesting the review could supply the following information for each indicator.

1. A detailed description including the title and definition, the purpose and rationale for the indicator, the method of measurement, the collection method, the measurement frequency, details on how data from the indicator would be disaggregated, guidelines on how to interpret data from the indicator, brief notes on strengths and weaknesses of the indicator, brief notes on challenges faced in using the indicator and any additional sources of information for the indicator.

In addition, it would be helpful if answers to the following questions were provided for each indicator.

2. How will data from this indicator be used?
3. What steps have been taken to ensure this indicator is harmonised with other indicators?
4. What process has been followed to ensure the technical value of this indicator?
5. What evidence is there that it will be feasible to track this indicator? (Please provide estimates of the systems and resources required)
6. Where is this indicator currently being used? Where has it been field-tested?



# Annex 4: Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
DFID	Department for International Development
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IRP	Indicator Review Panel
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MERG	Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group
PEPFAR	US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
TB	Tuberculosis
TWG	Technical Working Group
UK	United Kingdom
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization



## List of ALL MERG Documents 2007-2009

- 1. A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating HIV Prevention Programmes for Most-At-Risk Populations (2007):**  
Provides an overview of M&E methods and approaches for most at-risk populations; it covers the use of strategic information for programme planning, M&E. Its focus is on the M&E of targeted HIV prevention programmeM&E. Its focus is on the M&E of targeted HIV prevention programme
- 2. Additional Recommended Indicators. Addendum to UNGASS Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, Guidelines on Construction of Core Indicators (2008):** Presents the 40 core national indicators that provide minimum necessary information for national-level monitoring of the HIV epidemic and response, and to provide detailed specifications and guidance on the 15 indicators recommended in addition to the 25 UNGASS indicators
- 3. Organizing Framework for a Functional National HIV M&E System (2008):** This framework describes 12 main M&E system components and defines a performance goal and results for each component. The framework helps countries to define an agreed set of national performance objectives and measures for the HIV M&E system and to guide strategies for building capacity, where needed, to reach these objectives.
- 4. Glossary of M&E Terminology (2008):** contains an alphabetical listing of M&E terms and their definitions often with more in-depth explanations than would customarily be provided by dictionary definitions. The Glossary will facilitate and improve dialogue and understanding among all those who are involved in M&E of development activities. It should also serve as a valuable reference guide in M&E training. The selection of terms and their definitions in the attached glossary have been carefully discussed and endorsed by the Global UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (MERG)
- 5. Indicator Standards and Assessment Tool (2009):** consists of a set of agreed indicator standards that are relevant at the national level for program managers and service providers, who need to select, revise and use indicators to monitor, manage and implement their country's response to the epidemic effectively monitor. This will ensure that indicators provide decision-makers and key stakeholders with useful, feasible and relevant information. An additional aim is to reduce the burden of global reporting on countries by harmonising global level indicators across multilateral and bilateral organisations
- 6. Planning Tool for Developing a Digital Library of M&E Resources (2009):** A Planning Tool to help assure that users of a digital library can successfully locate resources and can make informed decisions regarding the quality of the materials. The Planning Tool has two purposes: 1) To provide guidance to current owners and future developers of a digital library on the range of issues to be addressed in usability and user-friendliness of the library and 2) To provide a list of questions to help organizations brainstorm if they can and should invest their resources in developing a digital library
- 7. Guidance HIV Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity-building (2009):** provides practical advice for national AIDS programmes that are planning and implementing capacity building activities as part of their effort to develop a unified and effective national HIV monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. The Guidance is relevant to the wide range of individuals and organisations involved in the national HIV M&E system; it is particularly relevant for the health sector, given its central role in M&E of HIV.
- 8. 12 Components Monitoring and Evaluation System Assessment – Guidelines to support preparation, implementation and follow-up activities (2009):** These Guidelines provide information on the preparation for and implementation of an assessment of the national HIV monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. It also includes key steps to take after an assessment to facilitate implementation of M&E system strengthening activities. The Guidelines are built around the 12 main components of the HIV M&E system, which define the Organizing Framework for a Functional National HIV Monitoring and Evaluation System (UNAIDS, 2008). Consequently, the Guidelines also focus on using the 12 Components Monitoring and Evaluation System Strengthening Tool (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2009a) to ensure a comprehensive and successful assessment.
- 9. 12 Components Monitoring and Evaluation System Strengthening Tool (2009):** Is a tool is for assessing how well each of the 12 components of a national HIV M&E system is functioning. The tool facilitates the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the national HIV M&E system and the prioritization of system strengthening activities.
- 10. Guidelines for Developing Terms of Reference for Prevention Evaluation (2009):** The Guidelines aim to foster a systematic approach to the evaluation of prevention programs by focusing on an often overlooked yet critical step in evaluation planning: the preparation of terms of reference (TOR). It can be used to facilitate the planning of evaluations for HIV prevention, discussions on the design of these evaluations, and the drafting of TOR to guide such assessments. It is intended for use by anyone who prepares or reviews TOR for evaluations of HIV and AIDS prevention programs and projects.



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